



## **Gas industry guidelines breath of fresh air January 20, 2016**

There are any number of quality-of-life items Pennsylvania – midstate in particular – could brag about. Air quality ain't one of them. So Gov. Tom Wolf and his environmental team are on the right path with last week's much-needed if overdue proposals aimed at reducing methane emissions from hydrofracking practices in the Commonwealth.

"Overdue" because, as PennLive/The Patriot-News' Candy Woodall [has reported in exhaustive detail](#), state leaders let eagerness to tap into the promised riches of the Marcellus Shale distract them (to put it charitably) from putting in place adequate environmental protection measures.

The Department of Environmental Protection's history of turning a blind eye to gas and [wastewater leaks at drilling sites](#), while letting energy companies largely police themselves, was a recipe for environmental degradation.

"Much needed" because the shoddy oversight is among the contributors to the state's dubious dishonor of having some of the worst air quality conditions in the country – [particularly at and around natural gas sites](#).

In fact, roughly 4 million state residents live in areas that exceed the national clean air standards for ozone levels, according to the Clean Air Council.

While some environmentalists would argue such a record merits shutting down drilling in the state entirely, Wolf is taking a more balanced approach, developing new guidelines and best practices to diminish the potential for leaks of methane – a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming and a host of health problems.

Speaking of global warming, a report released by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on the very day Wolf announced his new gas industry rules underlined why they're so badly needed.

Global temperatures rose dramatically for the second year in a row, making 2015 [the hottest year in recorded history](#). Federal scientists say the spike, which also saw record warmth in 10 of the year's 12 months, was exacerbated by the warming effects El Nino but the underlying cause is the massive amounts of greenhouse gases that continue to spew into and remain trapped in the earth's atmosphere.

None of this was lost on Wolf, who said the new rules could help make Pennsylvania a national leader in the fight to slow or reverse climate change.

Frankly, Pennsylvania has a ways to go to rival California, which, under Gov. Jerry Brown has pursued a robust series of anti-climate change strategies: boosting renewable energy to 25 percent of its power supply, putting nearly half the nation's electric vehicles on the road, and introducing a sweeping cap-and-trade program to rein in polluters. [According to the San Francisco Chronicle](#), state leaders have also begun preparing for the challenges of higher temperatures by steering development away from rising seas, creating drought-tolerant water supplies and reducing wildfire threats.

But Wolf is right to think big. And the targeted 40 percent reduction in methane emissions DEP Secretary John Quigley calls for would be a welcome improvement. Of course, that the DEP [does not know exactly how much methane is being released](#) is cause for concern. It's difficult to measure progress without a baseline.

The agency needs to quickly get a handle on monitoring.

Meanwhile, gas industry reps will no doubt kick and scream. They claim they have already worked to reduce methane emissions and that with the current [global bust in gas prices](#) the last thing they need are more regulations.

The industry is doubtless facing challenges but the suggestion that public safety and private profit can't coexist is specious.

Wolf's new rules have the state marching alongside the federal Department of Environmental Protection as it works to position the nation to meet emission reductions promised as part of the just-signed global treaty on climate change. Pennsylvania can, as Wolf suggested, set an example to other energy-producing states.

The move is timely, the goals laudable and the results, given the right follow-through, will be welcome.